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THE ART OF THE POTTER.

PROBABLY no other form of industrial art production has so important a relation to both art and natural science as that borne by ceramics, the work of the potter. The art goes so far back into the past of mankind that that which history may tell us about it is but as a few leaves out of a great volume. Its remains, therefore, constitute the chief basis for the study of the past of the race; as the Babylonian cylinders of terra cotta, with their cuneiform inscriptions, are the books that relate to us the story of a nation, so, for those who can read, is a large fragment of the record of the development of humanity to be found inscribed upon the vessels and potsherds of burnt clay found as the legacies of vanished peoples and cultures in nearly all parts of the world. Fragile as they are, there are also few things more enduring, and therefore it is that the science of archaeology is largely to be resolved into the study of ancient pottery.

Associated with the scientific aspect is also the artistic. Pottery is all-important in tracing out the history of the artistic faculty in man, and in it is to be found almost the earliest manifestations of artistic design, both in shape and in applied decoration. The great collections of pottery that represent the lines of ceramic production from the remotest recesses of antiquity down to the present, tell us how art began, and how it in its development expanded from this central trunk out into its numerous branches of activity that, with their thick foliage, masses of blossoms, and abundant fruit, have overshadowed the parent stem. The potter's art is one of the most honored as well as the most ancient; perhaps because of its being the most ancient is it that in Japan, for instance, the potter stands at the head of honorable and artistic callings. It has throughout the world given birth to a wealth of poetic imagery that clothes the loftiest conceptions of the human mind, and its associations with the ideas of death and immortality—the vessel of clay typifying the perishable body of man, with its contents, the soul, changing form and disappearing when the vessel is broken—may be traced back to the actual beliefs held by primitive man, who endowed all objects, inanimate as well as animate, with individual existences.

We know what beautiful imagery is associated with the potter and his vessels in the Bible, and in other Oriental writings, as in the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*. Fascinating, too, are the numerous legends and traditions connected with the art. One of the most impressive of these is the legend of the porcelain god of the Chinese, who was a potter and was deified for his martyrdom. The emperor was so pleased with the wonderful work of this potter that he ascribed to him the power to do the seemingly impossible, and so he ordered him to make a vase of a certain quality and color, counterfeiting "flesh moved by the utterance of a word, creeping to the titillation of a thought." He made repeated attempts, and was driven to despair by his unsuccess. But the emperor's word was law. Consulting an oracle, the potter was told that only by the use of human blood in the work could it be accomplished. Finally the potter flung himself into the glowing furnace, and when the vase was taken out it was found to meet the desire of the emperor, as expressed in his command. This legend is said to have a basis of fact, in that the combustion of the body really did produce the chemical combinations that wrought an entirely new effect upon the porcelain.

The origin of pottery is traced by science back to basket work; the first earthenware vessels were formed by accident, it is believed, by the coating of basket work trays with clay for roasting food; the coals placed on the clay baked it, and the basket work being separated easily, it was found that the burned clay by itself formed a most useful vessel. From this beginning the successive shapes of pottery vessels were evolved, always following types of basketry, as shown by similarities of form and the application of basketry decoration to pottery. The earlier writers on ceramics often endeavored to fix upon some period for the beginning of the potter's art, but science now tells us, in the foregoing conclusions, that the making of pottery had its origin so far back in the history of the race that it is impossible to assign, even approximately, any period. For history and for science the pottery remains of former ages are of invaluable service. As Marryat writes in his standard work: "From the pottery of the tombs we learn the domestic manners of nations long since passed away, and may trace the geographical limits of the various great empires of the world. The extent of ancient Greece, of its colonies and its conquests, is clearly to be traced through each division of the Old World by the Grecian funeral pottery, which, distinct in its character from that of any other, long survived the political existence of the Grecian Empire. The limits of the Roman Empire are, in like manner, deduced from the remains of the Roman pottery; beyond the spot where Arminius repulsed the remains of the Roman legions no trace of Roman pottery has been found, and the frontier line of the Roman dominion in Britain is marked out in

a similar manner. The extent of the Mohammedan Empire in the Old World, and the Aztec dominion in the New, would alike be clearly pointed out by their pottery, if no other record of their conquests had been transmitted to us." B. H.

ART IN CHINA.

THE Chinese are perfectly satisfied that their civilization is more than 30,000 years old, and that, consequently, their art flourished and had reached its height when our ancestors were still companions of the bears in caverns. This is no longer discussed; it is a dogma, in which every self-respecting Chinaman believes with an immovable faith. Moreover, some historians have taken the pains to furnish proofs perfectly convincing. Thus the author of a remarkable book, "Senki," publishes a chronological table of the sovereigns who have been in power during these myriads of years. Skeptics have only to verify these data provided in so generous a manner by the illustrious historian of the Celestial Empire. It is easy to understand that it is almost impossible, under these circumstances, to discover the true origin of Chinese art. M. G. Baux, who has lived in those quarters for a long time, has, however, endeavored to throw some light on this very interesting question. The attempt is the more meritorious, as, with the exception of the work of M. Paléologue, Chinese art has never been the object of special study. Thanks to the infatuation of M. de Goncourt, we have been surfeited with Japanese art, but its origin remains entirely unknown.

M. Baux begins his study with the accession of Wenming, the first accepted ruler, and officially known as the founder of the dynasty of Hid (2,205 B.C.). The arts were already greatly advanced at that epoch, when that Emperor, Yon the Great, had the history of his time engraved on a hard stone and placed on Mount Heng, and the technic of bronze must have been already quite well understood, since he ordered the casting of the vases on which he had traced the description of the nine principalities which became the first divisions of the Celestial Empire. Music, too, had so great a place that the emperor constructed with his own hands an instrument called "Kin," whose sounds, when he played on it, charmed people from their hearts. The art of cutting and engraving stones was quite common, so that tall buildings in memory of the great were erected, and the casting of metals was but play in the hands of skilled workmen. Now, it is evident that the Chinese could not have attained such a degree of perfection without having traversed epochs of successive transformations, and that, obeying the instinct common to all races, they must have tried to imitate nature in kneading the clay which they found under their feet. This is why I think, with most of the scholars whom I have consulted, that their primitive art was that of pottery. The moulded earth was dried in the sun and finally baked in order to harden it. Next they invented suitable tools with which to work. Then they covered the vases with drawings, representing scenes of life, memorable events, or else they traced hieroglyphics, signs of good luck, and finally they ornamented their houses and dedicated them to the Most High. But baked earth is brittle, so they began to use wood, or soft stone, or flint, which they polished, or whitish agate, green jade, or jasper, which they venerated because its red surface is the color of the blood of their ancestors. In digging in the ground to find richer veins of metal they discovered the brilliant, shining metals which charm the eyes.

Thus, the Chinese found brass and tin, lead and silver, combined with the other metals so common in their country, and they very easily made bronze by mixing these in certain proportions in order to produce vases for perfumery more beautiful and less fragile than ordinary pottery. I can thus understand how they gradually reached the knowledge of the technic of bronze, and why, 2,200 years before our era, they were sufficiently accustomed to this to cast brass vases on which were engraved their contemporaneous history.

With regard to Japanese art, the writer is of the opinion that it is only a copy of that of China. Even up to the time of Ming (the fourteenth century) they simply copied the pieces sold in China. Later, at the end of last century, they changed their methods and invented new decorations placed on identical forms. Even Japanese drawings, of which the boldness of style rendered by such simple means is so much admired, are but weak imitations of ancient Chinese paintings.—Translated from the French of G. Rousiers, in the *Paris Revue des Revues*.

The Artist—"A flattering likeness! No, indeed, Mr. Cashleigh. It's only the matter-of-fact, stingy, purse-proud man of pedigree we artists have to flatter. The artistic, generous, modest, self-made man, never!"—*Brooklyn Life*.